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H01L 29/6653; H01L 29/4983; H01L 29/6659; H01L 29/42376; H01L 29/402

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

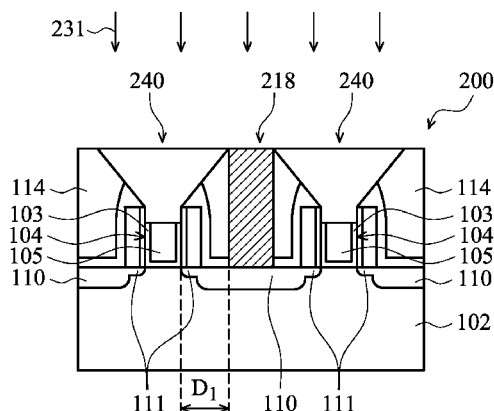
Embodiments of mechanisms of a semiconductor device structure are provided. The semiconductor device structure includes a substrate and a metal gate structure formed over the substrate. The semiconductor device structure further includes a funnel shaped hard mask structure formed over the metal gate structure. Formation of voids, which tend to be formed in a rectangular hard mask structure, is prevented. In addition, formation of a self-aligned contact in the semiconductor device becomes easier, and risks of shortage between the contact and a metal gate structure in the semiconductor device decreased. In addition, a method for forming the semiconductor device structure is also provided. The method may include a gate last process.

(52) U.S. Cl.

CPC *H01L 21/0334* (2013.01); *H01L 29/402*
(2013.01); *H01L 29/42376* (2013.01); *H01L*
29/4983 (2013.01); *H01L 29/6653* (2013.01);
H01L 29/6659 (2013.01); *H01L 29/66545*
(2013.01)

16 Claims, 10 Drawing Sheets

CPC H01L 21/0334; H01L 29/66545;



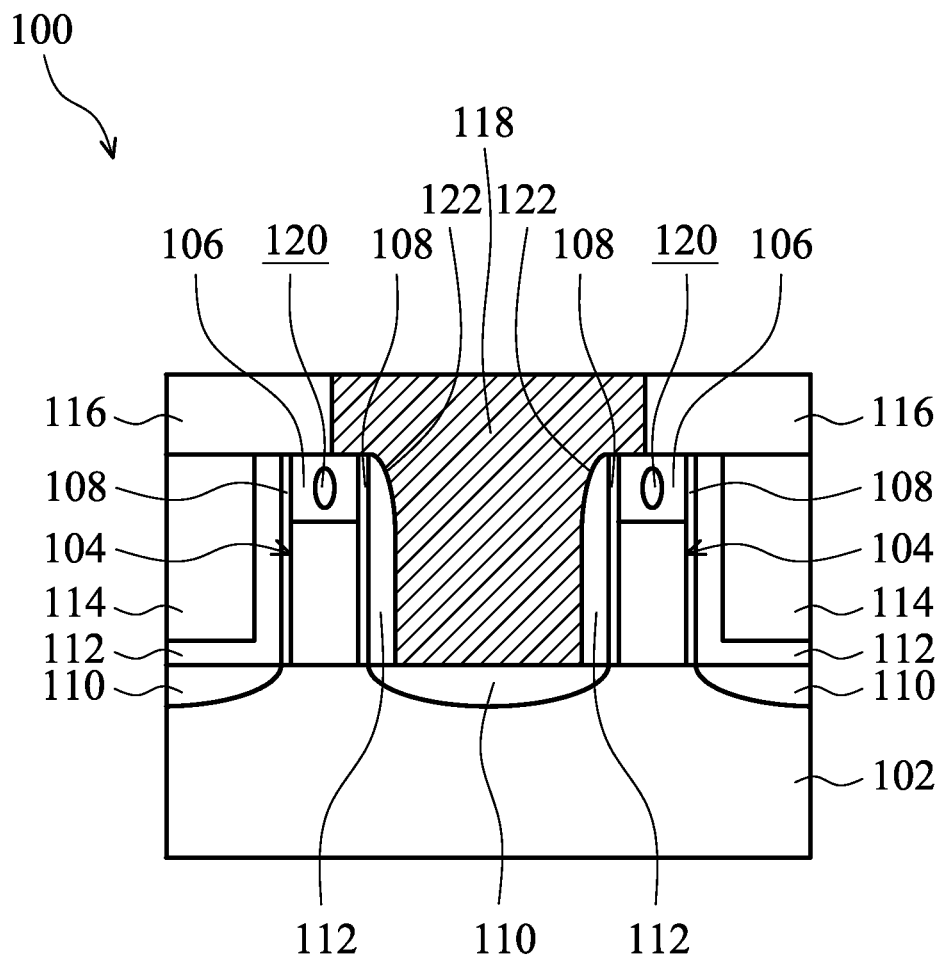


FIG. 1

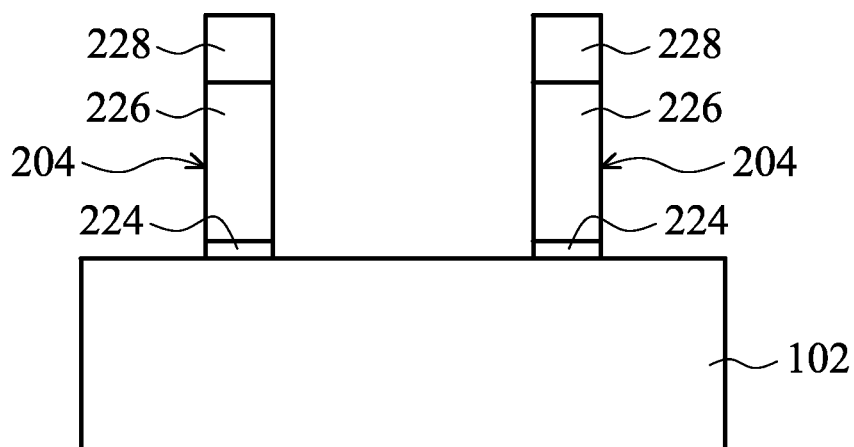


FIG. 2A

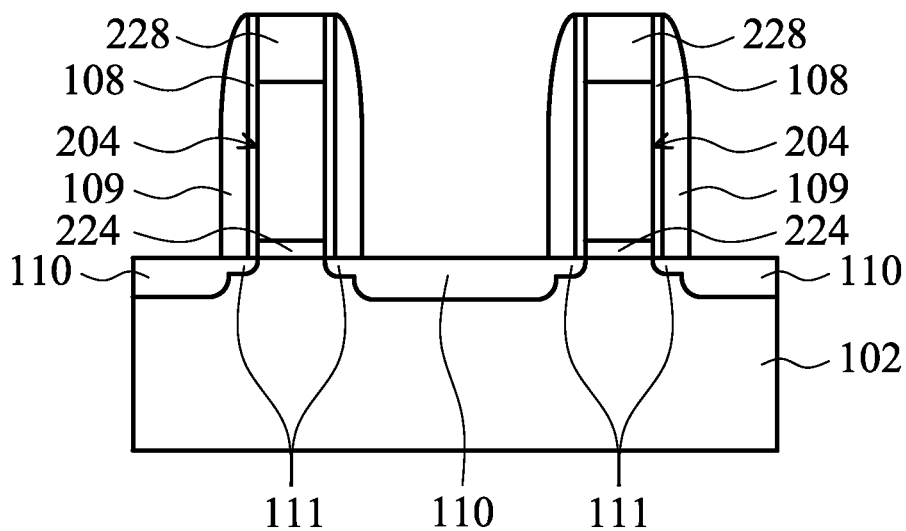


FIG. 2B

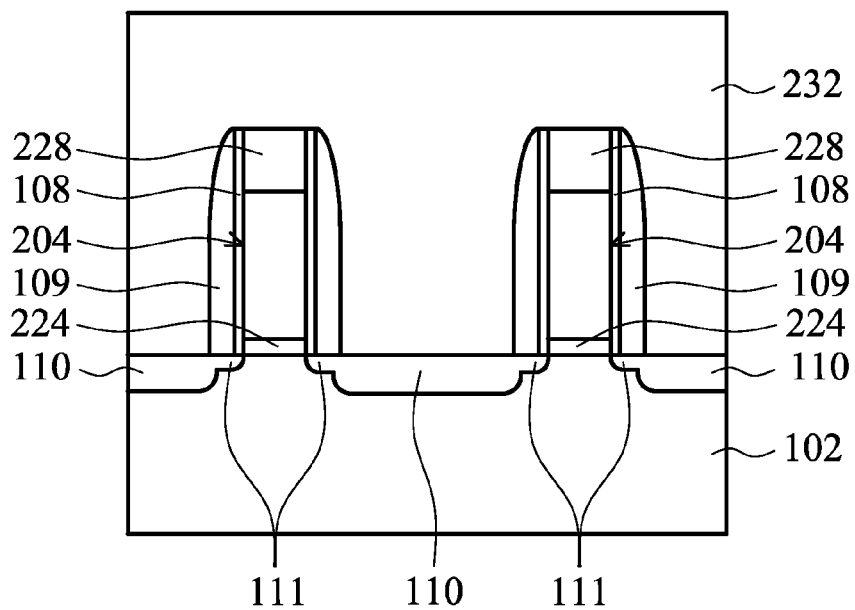


FIG. 2C

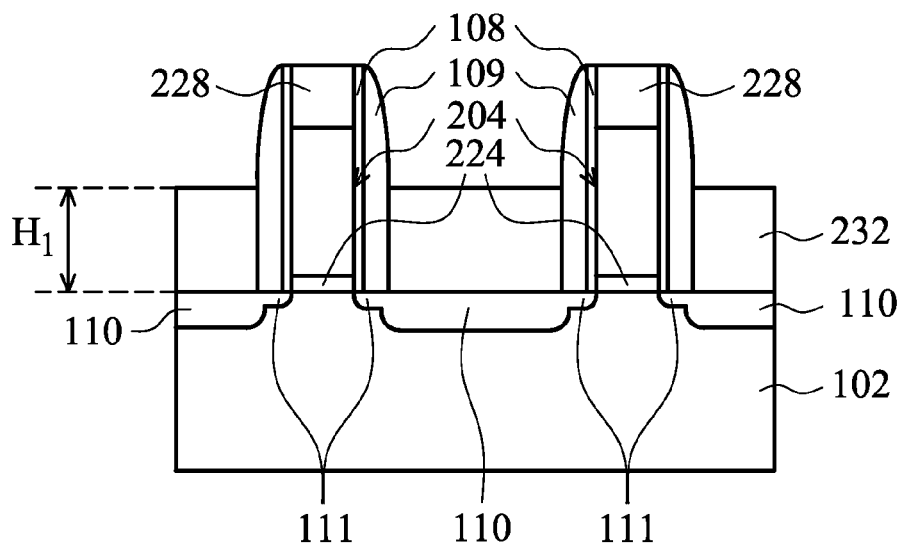


FIG. 2D

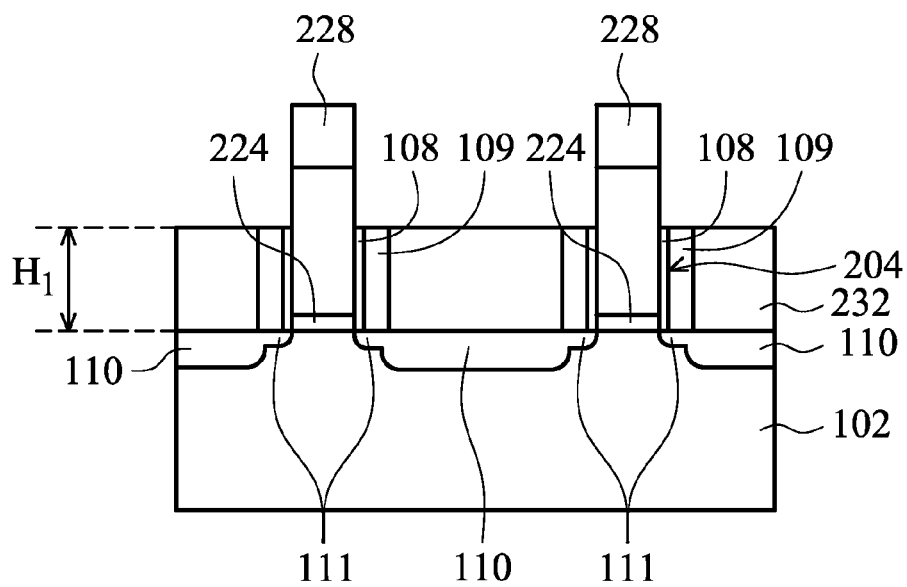


FIG. 2E

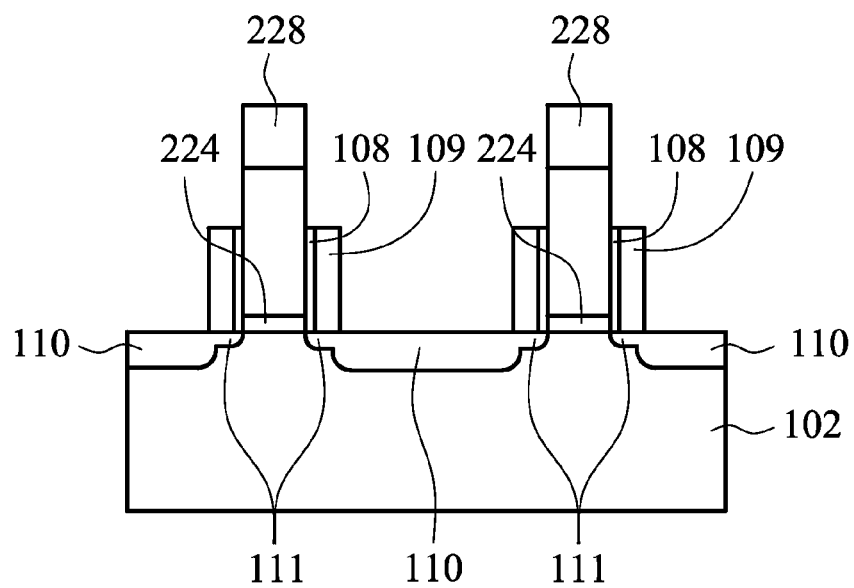


FIG. 2F

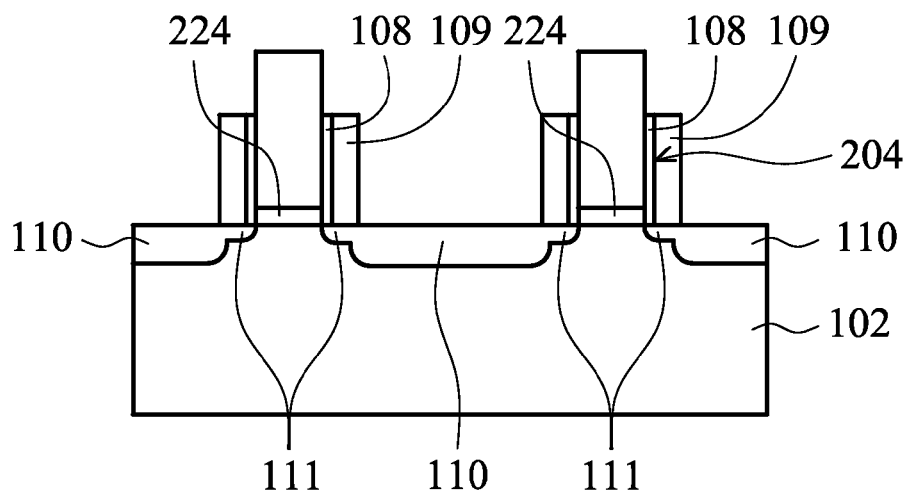


FIG. 2G

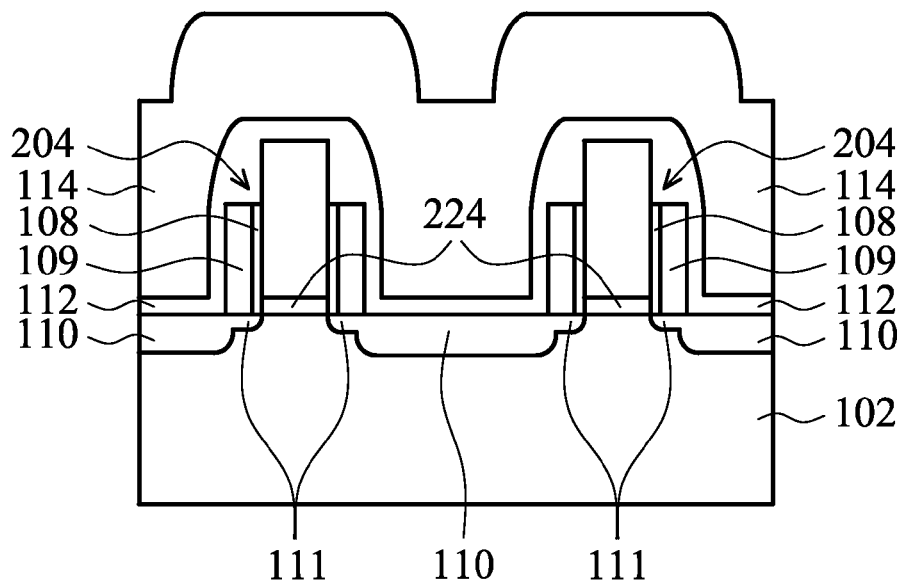


FIG. 2H

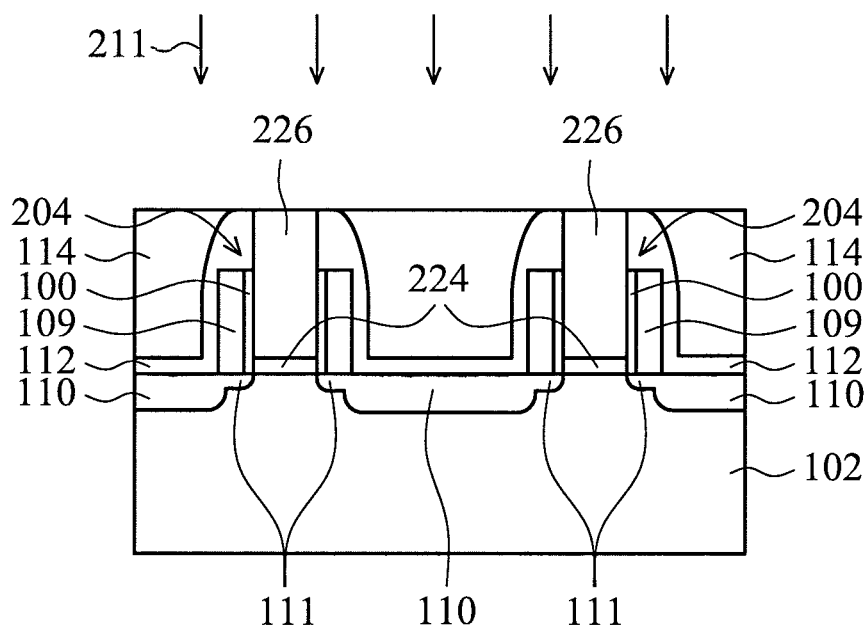


FIG. 2I

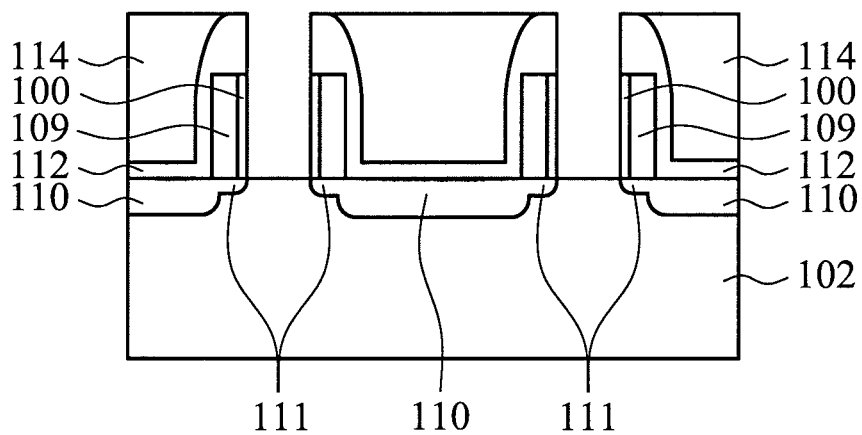


FIG. 2J

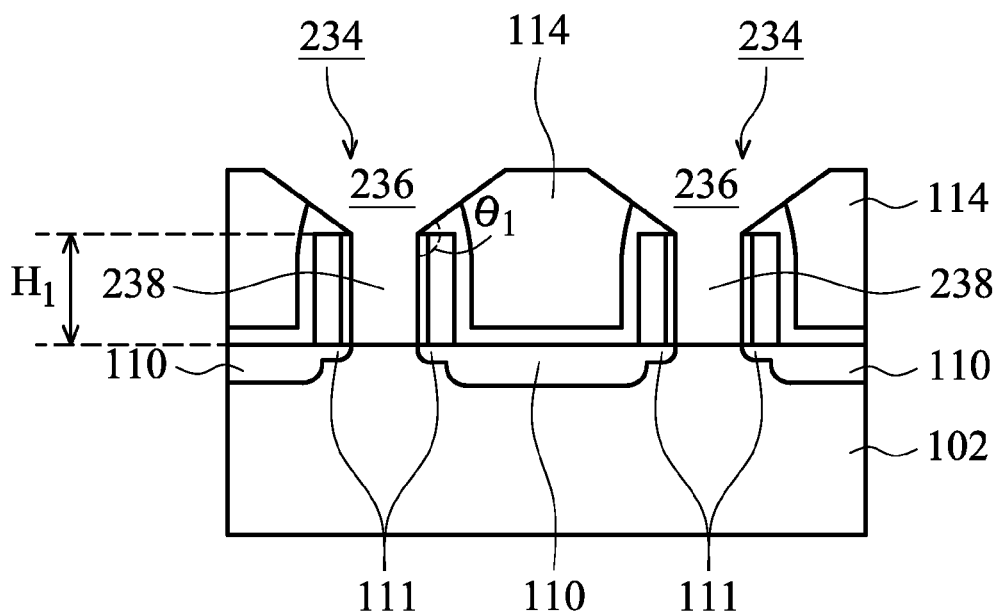


FIG. 2K

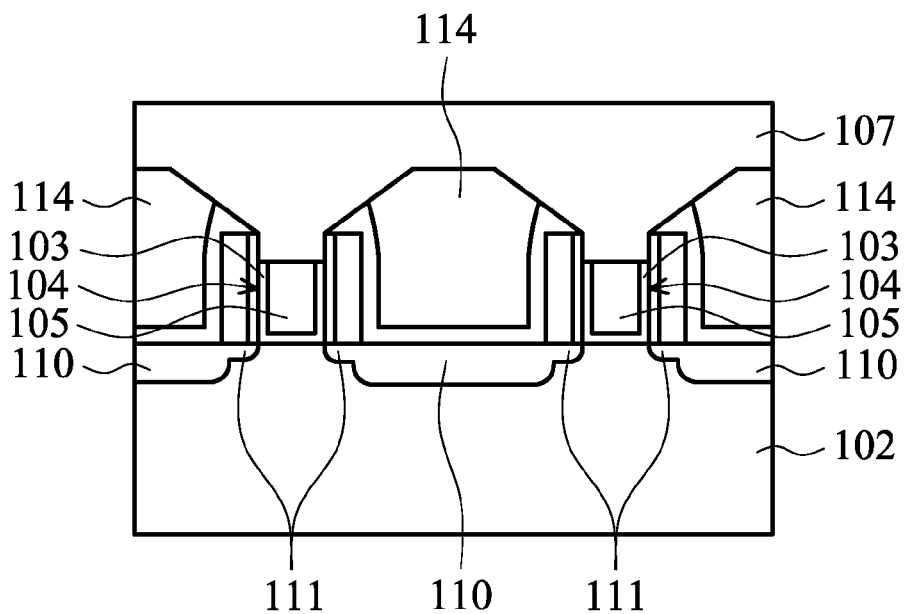


FIG. 2L

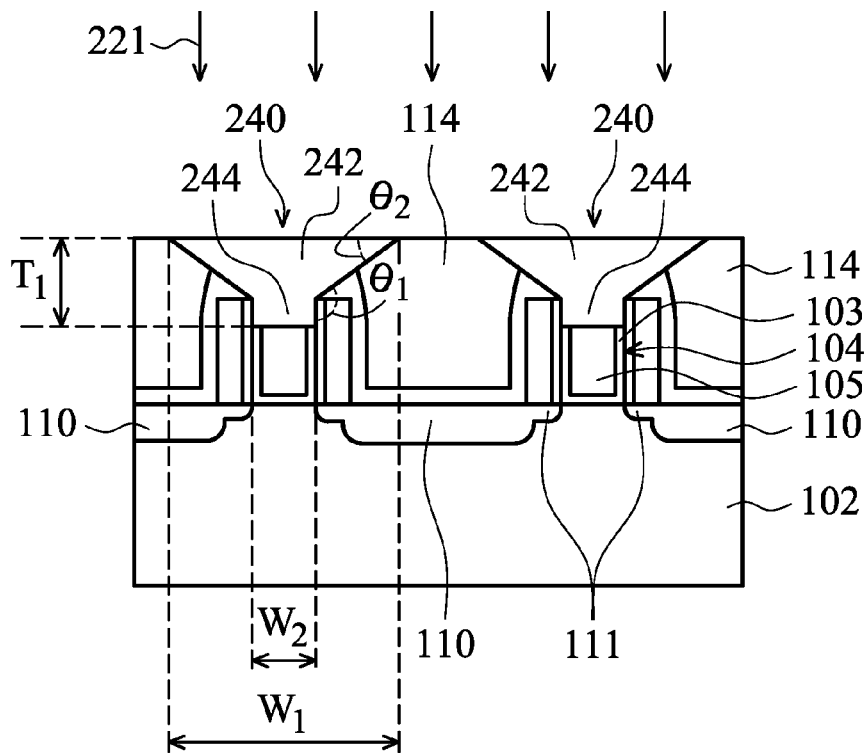


FIG. 2M

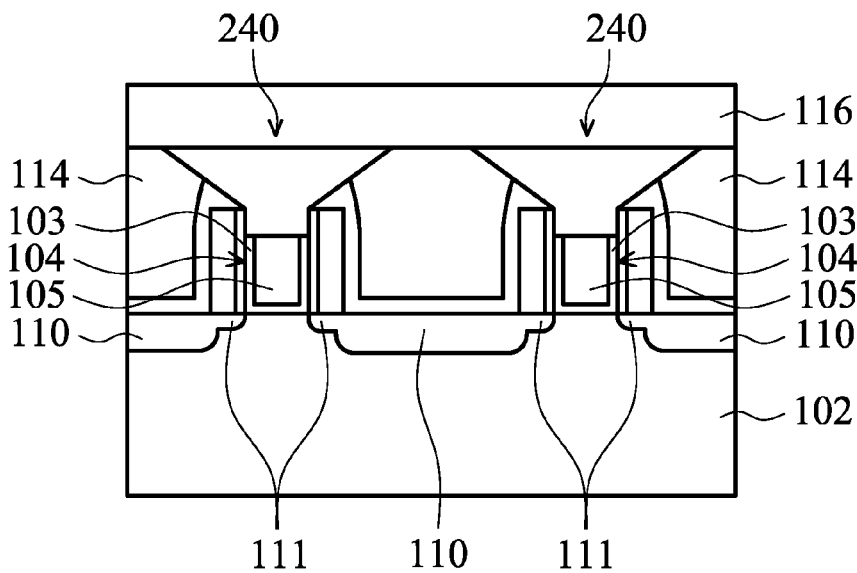


FIG. 2N

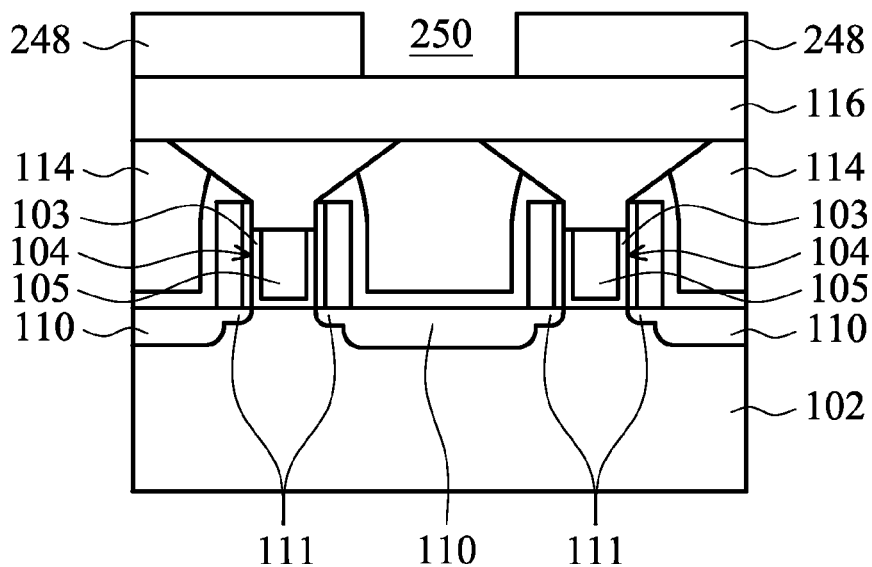


FIG. 2O

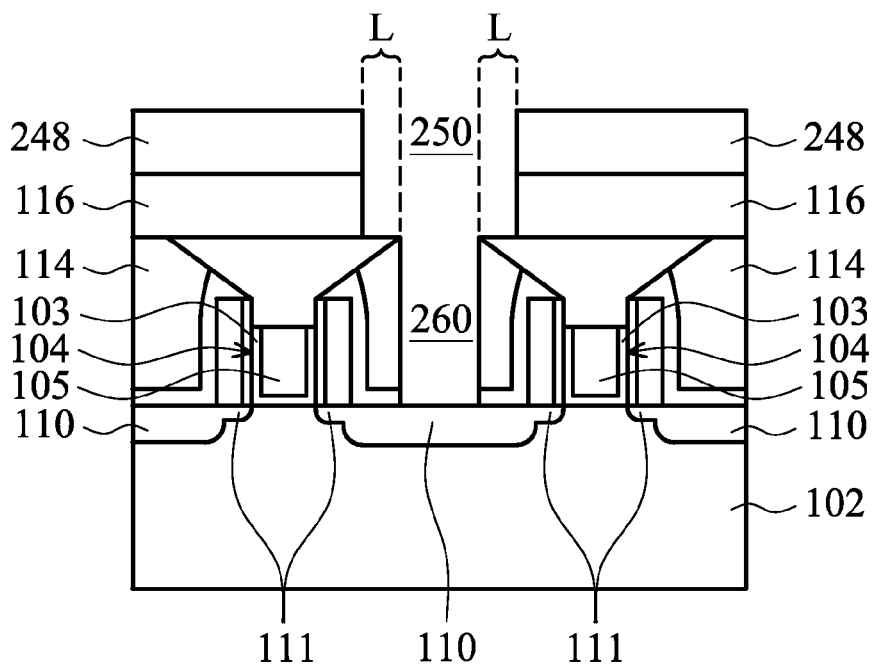


FIG. 2P

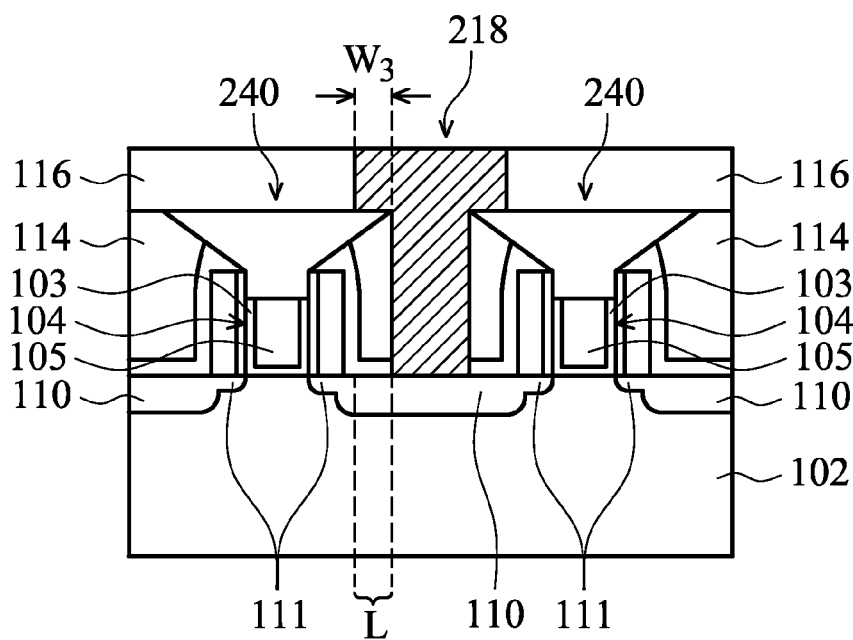


FIG. 2Q

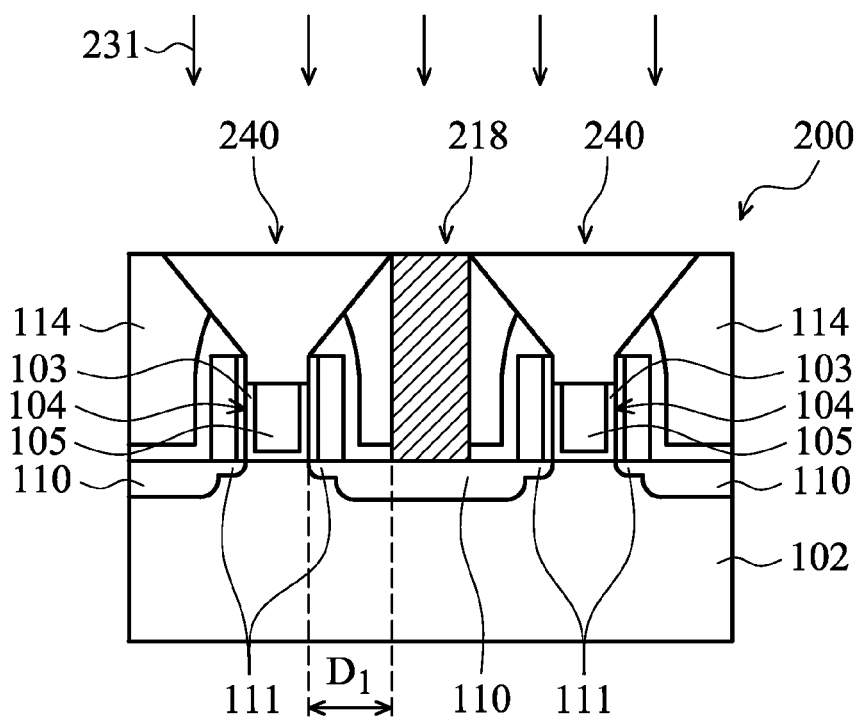


FIG. 2R

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MECHANISMS FOR SEMICONDUCTOR DEVICE STRUCTURE

BACKGROUND

Semiconductor devices are used in a variety of electronic applications, such as personal computers, cell phones, digital cameras, and other electronic equipment. Semiconductor devices are typically fabricated by sequentially depositing insulating or dielectric layers, conductive layers, and semiconductor layers of material over a semiconductor substrate, and patterning the various material layers using lithography to form circuit components and elements thereon.

One of the important drivers for increased performance in computers is the higher levels of integration of circuits. This is accomplished by miniaturizing or shrinking device sizes on a given chip. Tolerances play an important role in being able to shrink dimensions on a chip.

As technology nodes shrink, in some integrated circuit (IC) designs, there has been a desire to replace the typically polysilicon gate with a metal gate to improve device performance with the decreased feature sizes. One process of forming the metal gate is termed the “gate last” process. In a “gate last” process, the final metal gate is fabricated last which allows for a reduced number of subsequent processes.

However, although existing “gate last” processes have been generally adequate for their intended purposes, as device scaling-down continues, they have not been entirely satisfactory in all respects.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the present disclosure, and the advantages thereof, reference is now made to the following descriptions taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates a cross-section of representation of a semiconductor device structure in accordance with some embodiments.

FIG. 2A to 2R illustrate cross-section representations of various stages of forming a semiconductor device structure in accordance with some embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The making and using of the embodiments of the disclosure are discussed in detail below. It should be appreciated, however, that the embodiments can be embodied in a wide variety of specific contexts. The specific embodiments discussed are merely illustrative, and do not limit the scope of the disclosure.

It is to be understood that the following disclosure provides many different embodiments, or examples, for implementing different features of the disclosure. Specific examples of components and arrangements are described below to simplify the present disclosure. These are, of course, merely examples and are not intended to be limiting. Moreover, the performance of a first process before a second process in the description that follows may include embodiments in which the second process is performed immediately after the first process, and may also include embodiments in which additional processes may be performed between the first and second processes. Various features may be arbitrarily drawn in different scales for the sake of simplicity and clarity. Furthermore, the formation of a first feature over or on a second feature in the description that

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follows include embodiments in which the first and second features are formed in direct contact, and may also include embodiments in which additional features may be formed between the first and second features, such that the first and second features may not be in direct contact.

Some variations of the embodiments are described. Throughout the various views and illustrative embodiments, like reference numbers are used to designate like elements.

Mechanisms for a semiconductor device structure are provided in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure. FIG. 1 illustrates a cross-section representation of a semiconductor device structure 100. Referring to FIG. 1, semiconductor device structure 100 includes a substrate 102, a metal gate structure 104, a hard mask structure 106, a sealing layer 108, source and drain regions 110, a contact etch stop layer (CESL) 112, an inter-layer dielectric (ILD) layer 114, a dielectric layer 116, and a contact 118.

Hard mask structure 106 needs to be thick enough to prevent contact 118 from contacting metal gate structure 104. However, when forming the thick and rectangular hard mask structure 106, voids 120 tends to be formed in hard mask structure 106. Therefore, during the subsequent processes, the formation of contact 118 on voids 120 should be avoided or the conductive material of contact 118 may fill into voids 120. If the conductive material of contact 118 fills into voids 120, shortage between contact 118 and metal gate structure 104 happens. In addition, the allowable landing area of contact 118 on hard mask structure 106 tends to be small while narrowing down line width. As shown in FIG. 1, the resulting contact 118 has curving sidewalls 122, and curving sidewalls 122 may be too close to metal gate structure 104 and may also result in shortage of the structure.

FIGS. 2A to 2R illustrate cross-section representations of various stages of forming a semiconductor device structure 200 in accordance with some embodiments. As shown in FIG. 2A, substrate 102 is provided in accordance with some embodiments. Substrate 102 may be a semiconductor wafer such as a silicon wafer. Alternatively or additionally, substrate 102 may include elementary semiconductor materials, compound semiconductor materials, and/or alloy semiconductor materials. Examples of the elementary semiconductor materials may be, but are not limited to, crystal silicon, polycrystalline silicon, amorphous silicon, germanium, and/or diamond. Examples of the compound semiconductor materials may be, but are not limited to, silicon carbide, gallium arsenic, gallium phosphide, indium phosphide, indium arsenide, and/or indium antimonide. Examples of the alloy semiconductor materials may be, but are not limited to, SiGe, GaAsP, AlInAs, AlGaAs, GaInAs, GaInP, and/or GaInAsP.

In some embodiments, substrate 102 includes structures such as doped regions, isolation features, ILD layers, and/or conductive features. In addition, substrate 102 may further include one or more material layers to be patterned. For example, the material layers to be patterned include a silicon layer, a dielectric layer, and/or a doped poly-silicon layer.

As shown in FIG. 2A, a dummy gate structure 204 is formed over substrate 102 in accordance with some embodiments. In some embodiments, dummy gate structure 204 includes dummy gate dielectric layer 224 and dummy gate electrode 226. In some embodiments, dummy gate dielectric layer 224 is made of high-k dielectric materials, such as metal oxides, metal nitrides, metal silicates, transition metal-oxides, transition metal-nitrides, transition metal-silicates, or oxynitrides of metals. Examples of the high-k dielectric material include, but are not limited to, hafnium oxide (HfO₂), hafnium silicon oxide (HfSiO), hafnium silicon

oxynitride (HfSiON), hafnium tantalum oxide (HfTaO), hafnium titanium oxide (HfTiO), hafnium zirconium oxide (HfZrO), silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, zirconium oxide, titanium oxide, aluminum oxide, hafnium dioxide-alumina ($\text{HfO}_2\text{—Al}_2\text{O}_3$) alloy, or other applicable dielectric materials. In some embodiments, dummy gate electrode **226** is made of polysilicon.

Dummy gate structure **204** may be formed by a procedure including deposition, photolithography patterning and etching processes. The deposition processes may include chemical vapor deposition (CVD), physical vapor deposition (PVD), atomic layer deposition (ALD), high density plasma CVD (HDPCVD), metal organic CVD (MOCVD), or plasma enhanced CVD (PECVD). The photolithography patterning processes may include photoresist coating (e.g., spin-on coating), soft baking, mask aligning, exposure, post-exposure baking, developing the photoresist, rinsing, drying (e.g., hard baking), and/or other applicable processes. The etching processes may include dry etching, wet etching, and/or other etching methods (e.g., reactive ion etching).

In some embodiments, a hard mask layer **228** is further formed over dummy gate electrode **226**. In some embodiments, hard mask layer **228** is made of silicon oxide, silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, or silicon carbide. Hard mask layer **228** may be formed by a CVD process.

After dummy gate structure **204** is formed, sealing layer **108** is formed on the sidewalls of dummy gate structure **204**, as shown in FIG. 2B in accordance with some embodiments. Sealing layer **108** may protect dummy gate structure **204** from damage or loss during subsequent processing and may also prevent oxidation during subsequent processing. In some embodiments, sealing layer **108** is made of silicon nitride, silicon oxide, silicon oxynitride, silicon carbide, or other applicable dielectric materials. Sealing layer **108** may include a single layer or multiple layers.

Spacers **109** are further formed on sealing layer **108** in accordance with some embodiments. In some embodiments, spacers **109** are made of silicon nitride, silicon oxide, silicon carbide, silicon oxynitride, or other applicable materials. Spacers **109** may be formed by deposition and etching processes.

In addition, various doped regions may also be formed in substrate **102**. In some embodiments, lightly doped source/drain (LDD) regions **111** and source/drain (S/D) regions **110** are formed in substrate **102**, as shown in FIG. 2B. LDD regions **111** and S/D regions **110** may be formed by one or more ion implantation processes, photolithography, diffusion, and/or other applicable processes. The doping species may depend on the type of device being fabricated. In some embodiments, LDD regions **111** and S/D regions **110** are doped with p-type dopants, such as boron or BF_2 , and/or n-type dopants, such as phosphorus or arsenic.

Next, a photoresist layer **232** is formed over substrate **102** to cover dummy gate structure **204**, as shown in FIG. 2C in accordance with some embodiments. Photoresist layer **232** may be a positive or negative photoresist layer. In some embodiments, photoresist layer **232** is formed by spin-on coating. Additionally, a bake process may be applied to photoresist layer **232** in accordance with some embodiments. In some embodiments, the bake process is a soft baking process. The bake process may be used to remove the solvent in photoresist layer **232**.

Afterwards, an etch back process is performed on photoresist layer **232**, as shown in FIG. 2D in accordance with some embodiments. By the etch back process, photoresist layer **232** is etched to expose a top portion of dummy gate structure **204**. In some embodiments, the etch back process

is a wet etching process or a reactive ion etching (RIE) process. In some embodiments, photoresist layer **232** is etched using an etchant containing such as oxygen or argon plasma. It should be noted that various solution may be used during the etching process described herein or afterwards depending on various applications.

As shown in FIG. 2D, hard mask layer **228** has good etch selectivity toward photoresist layer **232** during the etch back process. Therefore, hard mask layer **228** is not removed by the etch back process. In some embodiments, the etched photoresist layer **232** has a thickness H_1 in a range from about 10 nm to about 100 nm.

After the etch back process is performed, portions of sealing layer **108** and spacers **109** not covered by (e.g. exposed by) photoresist layer **232** are removed, as shown in FIG. 2E in accordance with some embodiments. Remaining portions of sealing layer **108** and spacers **109** have a height substantially equal to height H_1 . In some embodiments, the exposed portions of sealing layer **108** and spacers **109** are removed by a wet etching process.

Next, photoresist layer **232** is removed, as shown in FIG. 2F in accordance with some embodiments. In some embodiments, photoresist layer **232** is removed by a wet etching process. After photoresist layer **232** is removed, hard mask layer **228** is also removed, as shown in FIG. 2G in accordance with some embodiments. Hard mask layer **228** may be removed by any applicable techniques, such as a wet etching process using an applicable acidic solution, such as CHF_3 or CH_2F_2 . As shown in FIG. 2G, remaining portions of sealing layer **108** and spacers **109** cover a bottom portion of dummy gate structure **204** and leave a top portion of dummy gate structure **204** uncovered.

Afterwards, contact etch stop layer (CESL) **112** is formed over substrate **102** to cover dummy gate structure **204**, as shown in FIG. 2H in accordance with some embodiments. In some embodiments, CESL **112** is made of silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, and/or other applicable materials. CESL **112** may be formed by plasma enhanced CVD, low pressure CVD, ALD, or other applicable processes.

After CESL **112** is formed, inter-layer dielectric (ILD) layer **114** is formed on CESL **112** over substrate **102** in accordance with some embodiments. In some embodiments, ILD layer **114** includes multilayers made of multiple dielectric materials, such as silicon oxide, silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, tetraethoxysilane (TEOS), phosphosilicate glass (PSG), borophosphosilicate glass (BPSG), low-k dielectric material, and/or other applicable dielectric materials. Examples of low-k dielectric materials include, but are not limited to, fluorinated silica glass (FSG), carbon doped silicon oxide, amorphous fluorinated carbon, parylene, bis-benzocyclobutenes (BCB), or polyimide. ILD layer **114** may be formed by chemical vapor deposition (CVD), physical vapor deposition, (PVD), atomic layer deposition (ALD), spin-on coating, or other applicable processes.

Afterwards, a chemical mechanical polishing (CMP) process **211** is performed to ILD layer **114**, as shown in FIG. 2I in accordance with some embodiments. ILD layer **114** is planarized by CMP process **211** until the top surface of dummy gate structure **204** is exposed.

After CMP process **211** is performed, dummy gate structure **204**, including dummy gate electrode **226** and dummy gate dielectric layer **224**, is removed, as shown in FIG. 2J in accordance with some embodiments. In some embodiments, dummy gate structure **204** is removed by dry etching.

After dummy gate structure **204** is removed, a plasma process is performed to form a funnel-shaped trench **234**, as shown in FIG. 2K in accordance with some embodiments.

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Funnel shaped trench **234** includes a cone-shaped top portion **236** and a tube-shaped bottom portion **238**. As shown in FIG. 2K, the height of tube-shaped bottom portion **238** of funnel shaped trench **234** is substantially equal to height H_1 . More specifically, the shape of the bottom portion of dummy gate structure **204** is protected by the remaining portions of sealing layer **108** and spacers **109**, and therefore tube-shaped bottom portion **238** of funnel shaped trench **234** is formed. However, the top portion of dummy gate structure **204** is not covered by the remaining portions of sealing layer **108** and spacers **109**, and therefore cone-shaped top portion **236** is formed.

As shown in FIG. 2K, there is an angle θ_1 between a sidewall of cone-shaped top portion **236** and a sidewall of tube-shaped bottom portion **238** of funnel shaped trench **234**. Angle θ_1 may be controlled by the angle of the plasma used during the plasma process. In some embodiments, angle θ_1 is in a range from about 120° to about 165° . In some embodiments, the plasma process is a high density plasma (HDP) process or an Ar plasma sputtering process.

After funnel shaped trench **234** is formed, metal gate structure **104** is formed in the bottom portion of tube-shaped bottom portion **238** of funnel shaped trench **234**, as shown in FIG. 2L in accordance with some embodiments. Metal gate structure **104** includes a gate dielectric layer **103** and a metal gate electrode **105**. In some embodiments, gate dielectric layer **103** is made of silicon oxide, silicon oxynitride, or other applicable dielectric materials. Gate dielectric layer **103** may be formed by an ALD process. In some embodiments, metal gate electrode **105** is made of Al, Cu, AlTi, TiN, TiCN, TaN, TaCN, WN, or WCN. Metal gate electrode **105** may be formed by PVD.

In addition, a hard mask material **107** is formed over substrate **102** to cover metal gate structure **104** in accordance with some embodiments. As shown in FIG. 2L, hard mask material **107** fills in the remaining portion of funnel shaped trench **234**. Since funnel shaped trench **234** has a large opening at its top portion, it is easier to fill in hard mask material **107** without forming voids. In some embodiments, hard mask material **107** is silicon nitride. Hard mask material **107** may be formed by a CVD process.

Afterwards, a CMP process **221** is performed, as shown in FIG. 2M in accordance with some embodiments. CMP process **221** is performed to expose a top portion of ILD layer **114**. In some embodiments, a portion of ILD layer **114** is removed during CMP process **221** to planarize or widen the top surface of ILD layer **114**.

As shown in FIG. 2M, after CMP process **221**, a funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** is formed. Funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** includes a cone-shaped top portion **242** and a tube-shaped bottom portion **244**. The width W_1 of a top surface of funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** (e.g. the width of a top surface of cone-shaped top portion **242**) is larger than the width W_2 of a bottom surface of funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** (e.g. the width of a bottom surface of tube-shaped bottom portion **244**). Since the top surface of funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** has a relatively large width, the landing area of the contact formed in subsequent process increases.

In some embodiments, a ratio of width W_1 to width W_2 is in a range from about 1.1 to about 5. In some embodiments, width W_1 is in a range from about 12 nm to about 200 nm. In some embodiments, width W_2 is in a range from about 10 nm to about 200 nm. When the ratio of width W_1 to width W_2 is too small, the contact formed afterwards will be too close to metal gate structure **104**. When the ratio of width

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W_1 to width W_2 is too large, ILD layer **114** tends to be under etched in the subsequent etching process.

In addition, since funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** has the large top portion, funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** with a relatively large thickness T_1 can be formed without voids being formed therein. In some embodiments, thickness T_1 is in a range from about 10 nm to about 50 nm. The relatively thick funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** prevents metal gate structure **104** from being too close to the contact formed afterwards.

As shown in FIG. 2M, a sidewall of cone-shaped top portion **242** and a sidewall of tube-shaped bottom portion **244** of funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** also form angle θ_1 . In addition, a top surface and the sidewall of cone-shaped top portion **242** of funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** forms an angle θ_2 . In some embodiments, angle θ_2 is in a range from about 30° to about 75° . When angle θ_2 is too large, filling hard mask material **107** becomes difficult and voids tend to be formed in the resulting hard mask structure. When angle θ_2 is too small, ILD layer **114** tends to be under etched in the subsequent etching process.

After funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** is formed, dielectric layer **116** is formed over substrate **102** to cover ILD layer **114** and funnel shaped hard mask structure **240**, as shown in FIG. 2N in accordance with some embodiments. In some embodiments, dielectric layer **116** is made of silicon oxide, silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, or other applicable dielectric materials. Dielectric layer **116** may be formed by a CVD process.

Afterwards, a photoresist layer **248** is formed over dielectric layer **116**, as shown in FIG. 2O in accordance with some embodiments. Photoresist layer **248** has an opening **250** over a portion of ILD layer **114** and a portion of dielectric layer **116** over funnel shaped hard mask structure **240**. Next, an etching process is performed to remove the portions of ILD layer **114** and dielectric layer **116** under opening **250** of photoresist layer **248**, as shown in FIG. 2P in accordance with some embodiments. In some embodiments, the etching process is a wet etching process.

More specifically, during the etching process, funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** is used as a mask to protect materials underneath, and therefore a T-shaped trench **260** is formed. As shown in FIG. 2P, a landing area L of funnel shaped hard mask structure **240** is exposed by T-shaped trench **260**.

After T-shaped trench **260** is formed, a conductive material is filled in T-shaped trench **260** to form a contact **218**, as shown in FIG. 2Q in accordance with some embodiments. In some embodiments, the conductive material is aluminum, copper, tungsten, titanium, tantalum, titanium nitride, tantalum nitride, nickel silicide, cobalt silicide, TaC, TaSiN, TaCN, TiAl, TiAlN, or other applicable conductive materials.

As shown in FIG. 2Q, contact **218** has an extending portion formed over landing area L of funnel shaped hard mask structure **240**. Since no voids are formed in funnel shaped hard mask structure **240**, the width W_3 of the extending portion of contact **218** (i.e. the width of landing area L) can be relatively large. In some embodiments, width W_3 is in a range from about 3 nm to about 100 nm. The extending portion of contact **218** prevents the formation of curving sidewalls (e.g. curving sidewalls **122** in FIG. 1).

Next, a CMP process **231** is performed to remove dielectric layer **116** and a top portion of contact **218**, as shown in FIG. 2R in accordance with some embodiments. After CMP process **231**, the top surface of contact **218** is substantially level with the top surface of funnel shaped hard mask

structure 240. Since contact 218 is formed by a self-aligned process using funnel shaped hard mask structure 240 as the mask during the etching process, a sidewall of contact 218 is adjacent to an edge of the top surface of funnel shaped hard mask structure 240. In addition, since the top surface of funnel shaped hard mask structure 240 is relatively large, the distance D_1 between metal gate structure 104 and contact 218 is also relatively large. Therefore, risks of metal gate structure 104 being too close to, or even contact to, contact 218 are prevented. In some embodiment, distance D_1 is in a range from about 3 nm to about 100 nm.

As described previously, funnel shaped hard mask structure 240 has a relatively large thickness, and therefore shortage between metal gate structure 104 and contact 218 is prevented. In addition, during the formation of funnel shaped hard mask structure 240, hard mask material 107 is deposited in funnel shaped trench 234. Since funnel shaped trench 234 has a relatively large top portion (e.g. cone-shaped top portion 236), formation of voids (e.g. voids 120 in rectangular hard mask structure 106 in FIG. 1) is prevented and contact 218 has a relatively large landing area L over funnel shaped hard mask structure 240.

Furthermore, in the manufacturing process described above, contact 218 is self-aligned to its designed position. More specifically, funnel shaped hard mask structure 240 is used as the mask for forming T-shaped trench 360. Since funnel shaped hard mask structure 240 (e.g. cone-shaped top portion 242 of funnel shaped hard mask structure 240) has a large top surface, alignment of opening 250 of photoresist layer 248 has a relatively large window. Therefore, the formation of self-aligned contact 218 becomes easier.

In addition, funnel shaped hard mask structure 240 do not have curving sidewalls (e.g. curving sidewalls 122 illustrated in FIG. 1). As a result, risks of shortages resulting from contact 218 being too close to metal gate structure 104 decrease.

Embodiments of mechanisms for a semiconductor device structure are provided. The semiconductor device structure includes a funnel shaped hard mask structure or a metal gate structure. The funnel shaped hard mask structure has a cone-shaped top portion and a tube-shaped bottom portion. Formation of voids, which tend to be formed in a rectangular hard mask structure, is prevented. In addition, formation of a self-aligned contact in the semiconductor device becomes easier, and risks of shortage between the contact and a metal gate structure in the semiconductor device decrease.

In some embodiments, a semiconductor device structure is provided. The semiconductor device structure includes a substrate and a metal gate structure formed over the substrate. The semiconductor device structure further includes a funnel shaped hard mask structure formed over the metal gate structure.

In some embodiments, a semiconductor device structure is provided. The semiconductor device structure includes a substrate and a metal gate structure formed over the substrate. The semiconductor device structure further includes a funnel shaped hard mask structure formed over the metal gate structure and a self-aligned contact formed over the substrate. A sidewall of the contact is adjacent to an edge of a top surface of the funnel shaped hard mask structure.

In some embodiments, a method for forming a semiconductor device structure is provided. The method includes providing a substrate and forming a dummy gate structure over the substrate. The method further includes forming an inter-layer dielectric (ILD) layer over the substrate to cover the dummy gate structure and performing a first chemical mechanical polishing (CMP) process to expose a top portion

of the dummy gate structure. The method further includes removing the dummy gate structure and performing a plasma process to form a funnel shaped trench. The method further includes forming a metal gate structure in a bottom portion of the funnel shaped trench and forming a hard mask material over the substrate. The hard mask material fills in a top portion of the funnel shaped trench. The method further includes performing a second CMP process to expose a portion of the ILD layer and to form a funnel shaped hard mask structure.

Although embodiments of the present disclosure and their advantages have been described in detail, it should be understood that various changes, substitutions and alterations can be made herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the disclosure as defined by the appended claims. For example, it will be readily understood by those skilled in the art that many of the features, functions, processes, and materials described herein may be varied while remaining within the scope of the present disclosure. Moreover, the scope of the present application is not intended to be limited to the particular embodiments of the process, machine, manufacture, composition of matter, means, methods and steps described in the specification. As one of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate from the disclosure of the present disclosure, processes, machines, manufacture, compositions of matter, means, methods, or steps, presently existing or later to be developed, that perform substantially the same function or achieve substantially the same result as the corresponding embodiments described herein may be utilized according to the present disclosure. Accordingly, the appended claims are intended to include within their scope such processes, machines, manufacture, compositions of matter, means, methods, or steps.

What is claimed is:

1. A semiconductor device structure, comprising:
 - a substrate;
 - a metal gate structure formed over the substrate;
 - a spacer comprising an inner side and an outermost side, wherein the inner side is closer to the metal gate structure than the outermost side, wherein the inner side is formed on the metal gate structure; and
 - a funnel shaped hard mask structure formed over and directly aligned with the metal gate structure, wherein a portion of a top surface of the funnel shaped hard mask structure extends horizontally past the outmost side of the spacer.
2. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:
 - a contact formed over the substrate, wherein a sidewall of the contact is adjacent to an edge of a top surface of the funnel shaped hard mask structure.
3. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the funnel shaped hard mask structure has a cone-shaped top portion and a tube-shaped bottom portion.
4. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein a top surface of the funnel shaped hard mask structure has a first width in a range from 12 nm to 200 nm.
5. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein a bottom surface of the funnel shaped hard mask structure has a second width in a range from 10 nm to 200 nm.
6. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein a thickness of the funnel shaped hard mask structure is in a range from 10 nm to 50 nm.

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7. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein an angle between a top surface and a sidewall of the funnel shaped hard mask structure is in a range from 30° to 75°.

8. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the funnel shaped hard mask structure is made of silicon nitride.

9. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 3, wherein an angle between a sidewall of the cone-shaped top portion and a sidewall of the tube-shaped bottom portion is in a range from 120° to 165°.

10. A semiconductor device structure, comprising:

a substrate;

a metal gate structure formed over the substrate;

a spacer comprising an inner side and an outermost side, wherein the inner side is closer to the metal gate structure than the outermost side, wherein the inner side is formed on the metal gate structure;

a funnel shaped hard mask structure formed over and directly aligned with the metal gate structure, wherein a portion of a top surface of the funnel shaped hard mask structure extends horizontally past the outmost side of the spacer, wherein the funnel shaped hard mask structure is made of silicon nitride; and

a self-aligned contact formed over the substrate.

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11. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 10, wherein the funnel shaped hard mask structure has a cone-shaped top portion and a tube-shaped bottom portion.

12. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 10, wherein a thickness of the funnel shaped hard mask structure is in a range of 10 nm to 50 nm.

13. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 10, wherein an angle between a top surface and a sidewall of the funnel shaped hard mask structure is in a range from 30° to 75°.

14. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 10, wherein the first width is in a range from 12 nm to 200 nm.

15. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 10, the second width is in a range from 10 nm to 200 nm.

16. The semiconductor device structure as claimed in claim 11, wherein an angle between a sidewall of the cone-shaped top portion and a sidewall of the tube-shaped bottom portion is in a range from 120° to 165°.

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